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TEACHING COMMERCIAL SPANISH

The experience of the writer convinces him that the inclusion of commercial Spanish in any course, whether commercial or academic, is a potent factor in vitalizing the work, definitizing it, offering a practical application of knowledge gained by many weary hours of study, and, finally, in affording an incentive which will stimulate interest to a very high degree. Even the academic pupil rejoices in the thought of having broken the bonds of the "literary" and the imaginative and revels in his new experiences of dealing with matter which is real, alive, and concrete. The study of commercial Spanish, particularly the correspondence phase of it, has the added value of assuring more careful work, greater accuracy, more attention to details, and tends to establish habits of clearer thinking in the language.

It is argued, and justly so, that the pupil should have a thorough grasp of the fundamentals of the language before commercial work is undertaken. Of course, an irregular verb, *ser* or *estar*, *a las ocho en punto*, does not lose its identity whether used in literary Spanish, commercial correspondence, or in a talk on the latest fashion in ladies' dresses. Still, it is strongly suggested that in the purely commercial course the vocabulary selected should be one met with in common commercial practice. Thus there would be no harm in introducing in the early stages of the study of the language such expressions as *acusar recibo de una carta*, *contestar a una carta*, *hacer un pedido de géneros*, *vender al por mayor*, *tomarse la libertad*, *entablar relaciones comerciales*, *establecer una agencia*, etc., expressions which could be employed advantageously in an every-day colloquial usage of the language. A text-book of commercial correspondence could supplant the traditional prose book which frequently treats of matters far removed from the field of commerce.

It is the practice in the De Witt Clinton High School, an academic school, not to introduce commercial Spanish until the fifth semester of the course. The foundation given the pupils in the first four semesters insures fast progress in dealing with Spanish correspondence. There are several obstacles, however, which will be mentioned farther on. A practicable distribution of several kinds of work in the third year of the course is two periods a week devoted to

prose composition, two periods given over to commercial correspondence, and one period a week taken up with reading of short stories written by representative authors of high caliber. The short stories are selected because they can be disposed of in one period and because they make for greater and more sustained interest. In the fourth year of the course two periods a week are devoted to prose work and commercial Spanish, and three periods a week to literature.

Two difficulties present themselves to the school which desires to offer a course in commercial Spanish—proper text-books and well-equipped teachers.

There are relatively few books dealing with commercial Spanish, and those we have at our disposal are in the main manuals or dictionaries in text-book covers. They lack the modern pedagogical treatment found in other texts and in no wise lend themselves to ready class-room use. The use of the outline letter, in texts dealing with commercial correspondence, instead of a complete letter to be translated from English into Spanish, offers a great handicap. The complete letter, on the other hand, offers a uniformity of purpose and effort, which in turn creates a definite problem that all the pupils of the class must solve. The definiteness of the task affords the teacher an opportunity for a well-directed, coherent, and effective drill.

Effective teaching in commercial Spanish is often not secured because the teacher is frequently ignorant of the fundamental principles of business practice. Even the English nomenclature and idioms used in commerce are in a large measure foreign to him. In his Hunter College class the writer found that teachers who are quite proficient in Spanish generally, had difficulty in comprehending the nomenclature used in English correspondence and following the technique of business procedure. The very same difficulty is encountered in teaching academic students who are taking commercial Spanish. A great deal of valuable time is consumed in teaching pupils the differences between a draft, a note, a receipt, not mentioning more complicated details of consular invoices, certificates of origin, bills of lading, and their importance, the meaning of a sight draft against surrender of documents, etc., etc. Special courses, in the hands of a competent instructor, might help teachers to overcome this difficulty, but the most effective way would be to work in some business house on full time or make arrangements for part-time work.

At some period of the course, perhaps the third semester, of a purely commercial course, the grouping of pupils into two classes is strongly advised; one for those who have difficulty in oral and aural Spanish, but who are otherwise proficient in written Spanish, and the other for pupils who are proficient in all phases of the language.

For the further vitalization of the work in commercial correspondence the project method is employed. The project may take the form of an American firm wishing to secure a new customer and sell him a bill of goods. One class takes the part of an American firm sending out a circular. This circular is sent to another class of the same grade, either in charge of the same teacher or another teacher. The latter class is the South American firm, of course. The teacher in charge acts as postmaster and delivers the "mail." The South American firm answers, and this exchange of correspondence is carried on till the project is completed. In connection with this work a very careful study is made of the daily consular reports, which serve as a basis for discussion and which furnish leads for "customers."

In connection with the work in commercial Spanish, the making of maps is encouraged. Outline maps are furnished the students. This series has been found valuable: population of countries and most important cities, cities and ports, climatological maps, maps showing the imports and exports of the several Spanish-speaking countries.

Pupils should be taught how to use the text-book, the dictionary, encyclopedias, and gazetteers. They should be taught to take advantage of the various governmental departments and private concerns which offer valuable information that could be applied to commercial Spanish.

To be sure, commerce is an effective instrument for drawing more closely together the bonds of nations, but it is not to be assumed that the mere acquisition of commercial formulas will suffice to create international amity and establish permanent commercial relations. The study of Spanish, whether commercial or otherwise, should be supplemented by a thorough study of the genius and character of the Spanish-speaking peoples. To that end a period a week could be devoted in class to hearing reports made by pupils on outside readings. Part of the period could be devoted to discussion of the pupil's report and to a lecture given by the teacher. The language used should be English.

If this work cannot be done in class because of lack of time, a club of the nature of the Latin-American Club in De Witt Clinton High School could undertake to fill this necessity. This club is spreading the gospel of Spanish-Americanism through a series of well-planned talks, frequently illustrated by moving pictures and slides, thus bringing far-away Spanish America nearer to the student.

The writer is not advocating the idea that commercial Spanish should be studied to the exclusion of Spanish literature. Both sorts of Spanish have their places in the school curriculum, but it is our function as intelligent educators to adapt our courses to the immediate needs of our pupils and the community. The situation is admirably summed up in a paragraph from *Modern Studies*:

"We have devoted four subsections to the practical ends of Modern Studies, and we owe no apology for putting practical ends first. Knowledge and training have a clear value in the struggle for existence, and in order to live well it is first necessary to live. Practical education is the only foundation on which idealistic achievements can be raised; to neglect the practical ends of education is foolishness; but to recognize no other is to degrade humanity."

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